



Focus: Student Voice

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How Can We Address a Problem that We Can't Even Discuss in School?

Excerpt from Testimony Against SB 3 Presented to the Texas Senate State Affairs Committee

by Santiago Hernandez

Editor's Note: During its special session, the Texas Legislature considered a proposal, Senate Bill 3, as a companion to the classroom censorship (HB 3979) measure that was passed in the spring.

Senate Bill 3 will censor and oppress our classrooms and whitewash our social studies curriculum. It is essential we are taught history as it transpired and the truth in its entirety. In order to raise empathetic and well-rounded generations of young Texans, to heal and move forward from this country's wrongdoings, we must be able to talk openly and honestly about these issues.

Critical race theory is a framework and/or a lens through which researchers analyze whether systemic racism exists and how it affects laws and public policy. This attempt to block students from learning the real truth of our history and limit their civic participation is censorship. These types of bills only divide our country further and are harmful for our students. Whitewashing our history books creates division rather than enabling the opportunity for discussion to unfold the diverse range and the truth of both history and current events.

How does that saying go? "Knowledge is power." What happens when the knowledge is repressed? We students are deprived of the knowledge we need to comprehend why things are the way they are now. All students deserve to have discussions around race, gender discrimination

and current events as they learn what it means to be a member of our democracy. Studying history allows us to observe and understand how people and societies behave. History provides us with the data that is used to create laws or theories of various aspects of society.

Sen. Bryan Hughes preaches about talking about our history, warts and all, but then proceeds to implement limitations on what educators can teach in their classrooms as written in this very vague bill. And it is still uncertain how TEA [Texas Education Agency] will interpret the law when creating the curriculum standards that will impact our future students.

Respectfully, I agree with Sen. José Menéndez. This bill is very disrespectful to our teachers and our students. To ignore the fact that we cannot discuss and deliberate the pain and trauma caused by the violence of all ill-treatment conducted by a specific group of people and multiple minoritized groups throughout the history of the United States and how this systemic issue continues to impact these groups now is a form of denial. Senators, how can we address a problem that we cannot even discuss in our classrooms? Please vote no on SB 3. Thank you for your time.

Santiago Hernandez is a freshman at the University of Texas at Austin.

IDRA helped bring students to the Texas capitol, connect them with the media, and facilitate meetings with lawmakers and their staff.



All students deserve to have discussions around race, gender discrimination and current events as they learn what it means to be a member of our democracy.

Don't Crush Our Craving to Talk about Our Ancestors

Excerpt from Testimony Against SB 3 Presented to the Texas Senate State Affairs Committee

by Alison Fernandez

Editor's Note: During its special session, the Texas Legislature considered a proposal, Senate Bill 3, as a companion to the classroom censorship (HB 3979) measure that was passed in the spring.

I urge this committee to not pass Senate Bill 3. Black and Brown students and other marginalized communities, such as myself, simply want to see our people reflected in the curriculum and to deepen the knowledge of our roots within the story of this country.

I look back on my formative years as a high school student trying to remember a time where learning about my Latinx heritage culture and simply who I am and what brought me here was deemed a threat to others. I can't remember because, in reality, learning these things creates well-rounded, critical thinkers and provides a safe haven for students like me.

By prohibiting teachers to speak the truth and covering the sun with one finger, we are perpetuating an environment of division and racism that remains unsolved because we cannot see it and tackle it together. Education should be about students, about our growth within our identities and our voices. SB 3 erases the efforts of Latinx and Black youth to become more knowledgeable about our communities and ancestors. We are expected to learn about JFK, Reagan and Bush. Are their lives more valuable than Barbara

Jordan or Emmett Till, or the millions of Black people (some who were slaves and former slaves) who fought for our freedom – the liberty and justice promised to all of us under this constitution?



I ask you all not to let history repeat itself, to no longer crush our craving to talk about our ancestors, and to simply let students be independent, critical thinkers. We can't change the past, but we can rewrite the future. If we can't criticize our own system, how are we expected to be outspoken and change the world? Thank you.

Alison Fernandez is a freshman at the University of Texas at Austin.

IDRA helped bring students to the Texas capitol, connect them with the media, and facilitate meetings with lawmakers and their staff.

Get information on the Texas HB 3979 law, the proposed SB 3 and advocacy tools
<https://idra.news/3979info>

Watch student testimony in our video gallery
<https://idra.news/StTestimonySB3>

By prohibiting teachers to speak the truth and covering the sun with one finger, we are perpetuating an environment of division and racism that still remains unsolved because we can't see it and tackle it together.



The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

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Student Researchers Report on Struggles their Peers Face During COVID-19

Excerpt from Report

by Jacqueline Campos, Monica Cruz, Alejo Peña Soto, Fatimah Rasul & Ana Ramón

During the summer and fall of 2020, four high school and college students led a participatory action research project to collect insights from our peers about the impact of COVID-19 on students and how the pandemic has worsened or changed the challenges young people face in their schools.

The project stemmed from IDRA's partnership with Seek Common Ground, which launched its COVID-19 Recovery Action Accelerator to support state and community-based organizations pursuing equitable and sustainable education policies and experiences.

IDRA announced in September 2020 our student team: Jacqueline Campos, Monica Cruz, Alejo Peña Soto and Fatimah Rasul. IDRA trained and supported us as we created, distributed and analyzed surveys about the needs of families and students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The key findings of the research and excerpts from student survey respondents are below.

Three out of four students reported struggling with mental wellness issues.

“I felt isolated and unmotivated constantly and online school became overwhelming.”

“I don't really talk to any of my friends anymore and I feel extremely lonely, I have breakdowns more often now, and every other day I feel awful about myself.”

“Isolation and the constant fear of getting my family sick has dramatically increased my anxiety and depression and has made me lose all motivation to pursue anything in life.”

“I feel bored and sad and cry a lot of the time now and just feel like I'm drowning at school.”

Students carried additional burdens due to virtual learning.

“There is often no separation from my school life and my home life. I'm always mentally thinking about the next assignment I have due



and it keeps me up at night and increases my stress and anxiety.”

“I am constantly on a laptop and my eyesight becomes strained throughout the day. Sometimes I'll get headaches from this as well. I often forget to eat.”

“I don't ask as many questions like I would if I was in person. I think many teachers think that because we are home, we just do nothing all day. That's not the case at all.”

Students faced pressure to maintain their education while also managing responsibilities outside of the classroom.

“Sometimes being off camera is helpful along with helping the little kiddos [at home] with their school as I'm listening through my air pods.”

“I have family members in the hospital, and schoolwork is a stress that is hard to deal with especially because of the increased workload.”

Our report will be available soon at www.idra.org. Also see IDRA's new eBook, *Ready – Reopen – Reconnect! Proven Strategies for Re-engaging Students Who Need You the Most*, at <https://idra.news/ReadyReopenReconnect>.

Resources

Campos, J., Cruz, M., Peña Soto, A., Rasul, F., Ramón, A. (August 2021). *Student Reflections on Schooling During COVID-19 – Student-Led Research Project Explores Effects of the Pandemic on Students and Schooling*. San Antonio: IDRA.
 Ramón, A. (March 2021). Student Researchers Collect Insights from Peers about the Pandemic's Effects on Schooling. *IDRA Newsletter*.



Chief Science Officers Encourage STEM and a Healthy State of Mind

by Owen Balagia & Reagan Lindsey

Editor's Note: Chief Science Officers are students in grades 6-12 who serve as liaisons for STEM in their schools and communities. They learn leadership skills to implement on-campus projects (or "action plans") and advocate for student voice in STEM. IDRA manages the Texas expansion of the international program, particularly into historically under-resourced schools and to serve low-income students, students of color and girls. Below and on the next page, CSO students share highlights from their time in the program.

Do you want to know what it's like being a Chief Science Officer during a global pandemic? It's kind of challenging.

We are Owen Balagia and Reagan Lindsey, from Brentwood STEAM School of Innovation in Edgewood ISD. We are two of the youngest Level 2 CSOs in Texas and were named the Middle School CSOs of the Year for 2021.

So how did we get to that level of success? A lot of starting, failing and starting again!

We tried to keep up with school and being stuck at home, but we realized that we felt really distanced from our friends and the people who motivate us to keep wanting to achieve more. We are

cousins and best friends, so we always had someone. But not everyone did. We chose to make mental health part of our action plan to make sure students were still involved in STEM but also had a healthy state of mind.

For our action plans, we chose STEM picture books and made videos of ourselves reading them. It was not always easy. We had to do a lot of practice because we were held to a high standard, and there were a lot of distractions. It was also hard keeping a straight face while we filmed (our bloopers are crazy long).

We sent the videos to other students so they could connect with us in their own homes. We also read about things students could do to practice strong mental health and gave them a few quick strategies.

This year, we learned that COVID-19 made a lot of tragic things happen to the families in our community and across the world. But we also learned that STEM career fields are full of amazing people who are out there saving lives and making the world a safer place, like the people at Knight Aerospace who we got to interview during a virtual tour for CSOs.



As CSOs we might not have saved lives, but we hope we saved the day when another student needed a laugh or just to know that someone was out there thinking of them during this difficult year.

Owen Balagia and Reagan Lindsey are eighth grade students at Brentwood STEAM School of Innovation in Edgewood ISD.

Learn More about the Texas Chief Science Officer Program & How to Bring it to Your School

Webinar Recordings

How the Chief Science Officers Program Engages Students in STEM
<https://idra.news/CSOstartWebinar>

Elevate the Voices of Students in STEM at Your School – Q&A on Hosting the Texas Chief Science Officer Program
<https://idra.news/CSOqaWebinar>

Chief Science Officer Students Determined to Promote STEM Despite School Closures
<https://idra.news/CSOwbr>

Classnotes Podcast Episode
Meet the Chief Science Officer Students Who Brought the Program to Texas
<https://idra.news/pod199>



See IDRA's new eBook:
Ready – Reopen – Reconnect! Proven Strategies for Re-engaging Students Who Need You the Most
<https://idra.news/ReadyReopenReconnect>



Leading a STEMonstration on Water Purification

by Landon Villarreal



Hello, my name is Landon Villarreal, and I am a Chief Science Officer at CAST Med High School. For the initial action plan,

the other CSO at my school and I wanted to host a demonstration involving STEM to CAST Med Students. Fortunately, our school was hosting a health and happiness conference, and we took the opportunity to incorporate our action plan idea by taking a part of the conference to demonstrate a water purification process through the use of electrocoagulation, which uses electricity instead of chemicals to remove contaminants from water.

Alongside this demonstration, Ryan Beltrán, the founder of Elequa, a non-profit organization focused on education through water innovation, provided water kits for all the students and explained the process of electrocoagulation, and how it can be used as a purification process for water.

When deciding how to present our STEMonstration, the main challenge we faced was trying to ensure that all students could be reached in our activity due to a large portion being virtual at the time. In order to do this, we broadcasted the entire demonstration via Zoom to all CAST Med Students. All in-person students were provided with their own water kits to perform the experiment as they watched through Zoom. Students at home also were able to obtain a water kit from the school if they choose.

All CAST Med Students were able to experience the process of electrocoagulation in a fun and interactive way, and Ryan Beltrán was able to present the message of Elequa and reach many students.

Landon Villarreal is attends CAST Med High School in San Antonio ISD.

Chief Science Officers in Texas

Elevating the voices of students in STEM



Students leading students in STEM!

CSOs are students in grades 6-12 elected by their peers to be liaisons for STEM in their schools and communities. They learn leadership skills to implement on-campus projects and advocate for student voice in STEM.

The Arizona-based SciTech Institute initiated this international CSO program in 2015. The Alamo STEM Ecosystem (a member of the International STEM Learning Ecosystem) brought it to San Antonio in 2018. IDRA manages the Texas expansion of the program, particularly into historically under-resourced schools and to serve low-income students, students of color and girls.

Every CSO gets to experience...

Leadership Training Institute teaches networking, leadership development, verbal and written communication, and team building.

Cabinet Meetings and Community Events guide collaboration with business and civic leaders to address community challenges, improve communication and confidence, and share common experiences.

Mentorship training opportunities with STEM professionals – vetted regional leaders who help CSOs implement their ideas on campus and express their voice in the community.

Become a Mentor
Mentors serve as role models and help CSOs carry out their projects.

Become a Sponsor
Your donations help us bring the CSO program to schools and communities around the state.

Bring the Program to Your School
Support your students as they catalyze a culture of innovation!

Contact IDRA for more information: Dr. Stephanie Garcia
stephanie.garcia@idra.org • www.idra.org/services/chief-science-officers-program

With CSOs, you can...

- Enrich school STEM culture and career awareness.
- Increase student voice in STEM conversations in the community.
- Create a pipeline of diverse STEM student leaders.
- Foster communication and collaboration among students.



Powerful results!

87%	of CSOs reported progress in inspiring their peers with STEM.
95%	of CSOs expressed increased interest in a STEM career.
72%	of adults intend to share the program with their associates after meeting a CSO student.
90%	of CSOs expressed increased connection with the STEM community.

Immigrant Students' Rights to Attend Public Schools

As schools kick off this school year, IDRA is releasing this new infographic as a reminder that public schools, by law, must serve all children.

Schools should not discourage students without certain documents from attending school. In fact, students are *required* to attend school under the state's compulsory education laws.

And schools should assure parents that the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* restricts schools from sharing information with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE).

IDRA's focus is to strengthen schools to work for all children, families and communities. Help us make this goal a reality for every child; we simply cannot afford the alternatives.

Denying undocumented students or children of undocumented parents access to an education is unconstitutional and against the law.

This infographic in full color and bilingual is available on IDRA's website along with many other resources for schools and advocates. We encourage you to share them across your networks.

<https://idra.news/ImmigEd>

Other Tools...

 **eBook in English & Spanish**

 **Bilingual flier to copy & share**

Welcoming Immigrant Students in School

Immigrant students are guaranteed access to free public education by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Certain procedures must be followed when registering undocumented immigrant children (and those whose parents are undocumented) in school to avoid violation of their civil rights as outlined in the *Plyler vs. Doe* decision.



Public schools cannot deny admission to a student on the basis of undocumented status.



Public schools cannot require students or parents to disclose their immigration status.



Public schools cannot ask students or parents questions intended to expose their undocumented status.



Public schools cannot require social security numbers from students or parents.



Public schools cannot demand that parents produce driver's licenses or other identification documents that are not required.



Public schools cannot engage in any practices that "chill" or hinder the right of access to school.

All children are required under state laws to attend school until they reach a mandated age.



School personnel have no legal obligation to enforce U.S. immigration laws.



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are to refrain from enforcement actions at certain sensitive locations, which include schools, as detailed in ICE's own policies.



The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act prohibits schools from providing any outside agency (including ICE) with any information from a child's school file that would expose the student's undocumented status.



The only exception is if an agency gets a court order (subpoena) that parents can then challenge.

What schools can do...



Focus on teaching all students.



Pro-actively show parents that their children are welcome.



Ensure teachers and staff are properly trained about protecting the rights of children and on culturally competency.



Communicate with parents in their language.



Share information about resources for students, families and educators (in English and other languages at the school).



Review all of your enrollment and registration documents (including forms, websites, and communications with parents) to be clear that the provision of the child's social security number, birth certificate, etc., is voluntary, and that not providing such information will not bar a child's enrollment.



Adults without social security numbers who are applying for a free lunch and/or breakfast program for a student need only state on the application that they do not have a social security number.



Get more info and resources, including IDRA's School Opening Alert Flier & eBook.

<https://idra.news/IDRAigwWelcome>

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Children First
IDRA
Transforming Education

Our Experiences Make Us Who We Are

by Santiago Sosa

Have you ever been told “no” by an adult before? If you said “no,” then you must have had the best childhood ever. Every day a child is told “no” by an adult. Why? Why must adults say “no”? When a child does something either good or bad, they will always learn from it. These actions will always better a child’s intellect, because they are learning and growing their mindsets.

When I was in elementary school, I was put into a dyslexic program to better myself in reading. No problem, right? I was in the third grade and around that time, my peers were checking out chapter books. I had a lower reading level and never got the chance to read chapter books. One day, I got the courage to check out a Junie B. Jones book. I went to check out the book, and the librarian told me, “I know your reading level isn’t that high, please get another book that’s at a dyslexic level.” My high hopes were shattered because of what the librarian told me. I turned around and went back to my class with no books. My classroom teacher asked me, “Where are your books?” I told her the situation, and she marched me right down to the library and checked out the Junie B. Jones book for me. I realized that she believed in me.

There are many reasons as to why joined the Valued Youth Partnership program, and I could go on and on as to why I stayed. I wouldn’t even be writing this if it wasn’t for my tutee who reminded me how hard it can be to learn differently from others.

A few months ago, I walked into his classroom, and I noticed that he wasn’t as cheerful as usual. I walked to his desk and asked him why he was so down. The thing is, my tutee is always in a great mood; nothing really brings him down. Then he told me that he made a low score on his AR book test. I told him that it was okay and that it just means that he would just have to try harder next time. I thought I was in the right that I told him that, but when I looked at his face, tears were

falling down his cheeks. I told him that I didn’t mean to make him sad and asked what was wrong. He told me that one of his classmates called him “dumb,” and I instantly understood why he was so mad. His so-called friend then told him, “That’s exactly why you have a tutor because you need help because you’re dumb.”

This is exactly why I stayed in the Valued Youth Partnership program: I know the struggles of being pulled out of class and the embarrassment of being pulled out in front of your classmates. I told my tutee to let them make fun of you, but in the end, they are the ones who are dumb, that there is nothing wrong with you learning and getting extra help from me and your teacher.



To this day, I thank my third-grade teacher because she believed in me when no one else did; and I hope I am leaving that kind of impact on my tutee. “Never forget what you are. The rest of the world will not. Wear it like armor, and it can never be used to hurt you” (Game of Thrones, George R.R. Martin). Our experiences make us who we are. While my experience in third grade was hard, I learned that teachers are the ones who can help you see your true value. It also prepared me to work with my tutee, to show him that there are people who care, and that’s what is important in life.

Santiago Sosa was in the 11th grade at Odessa High School, Ector County ISD, Texas, when he was named the Valued Youth Partnership first place high school essay winner in 2018.

Bring the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership to your school

Now more than ever, reconnecting with students is critical. IDRA can help!

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership provides leadership experiences for students across the country. It increases students’ connectedness, academic achievement, self-efficacy and self-esteem by placing students in leadership positions.

During this new year, the Valued Youth Partnership’s key philosophy of valuing youth’s gifts and developing social skills can provide leadership experiences for students who most need engagement as schools adapt.



See this powerful dropout prevention & youth leadership program in action!

<https://www.idra.org/valued-youth>

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Focus: Student Voice

Family Engagement Online Technical Assistance

Available free!

Few people question the value of parents being involved in schools. But many school leaders labor with traditional strategies that have little meaning or success.

Families can be their children's strongest advocates for promoting quality neighborhood schools and to ensure excellent academic instruction – where children are safe, happy, learning and engaged.

The IDRA EAC-South's Family Engagement Web-based Technical Assistance Package provides educators tools for embracing what, for many, is a new vision for engaging with families and community members.

This web-based package includes literature reviews, articles, podcasts, and five learning chapters, each with a video and supporting resources.



<https://idra.news/webFamEngage>



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